

Deb Thibodeau – OTF # 87

Mercer ordered that a girl's hair be cut off to punish her because he had a vision from God that she had been sexually inappropriate with young children.

She was beaten and forced to wear a mask and clothes that covered much of your body hiding her bruises, her fingertips were burned so that she would know what hell felt like was that referring to you?

Deb: Yes, that was me.

Rod: And how old were you at the time? You said nine years old.

Deb: I was nine when that happened.

Rod: And this is because he had a vision from God, obviously that the court's referring to.

Deb: yes. Well, and it's interesting because I feel like what happened is when we had that prayer meeting and I've talked about that in my book as well. When we had the prayer meeting in the Park where the children were in the chapel and Leo Mercier, you know, had come to give us a little magic show that day and talk to us about how the blood of Jesus would cleanse your heart.

And then he set us all up to, to tell him our sins and then we would be forgiven and we would get the holy ghost. And he had a rubber stamp that he stamped in a red ink pad. And when you had confessed your sins to him, he would pray with you a little bit. And then he would stamp you on the back of your hand with the Holy Ghost.

Well, you know, we were kids, we were kind of excited about the, the bottles he had. He had two glasses of water or a glass of water in two bottles and he dropped, uh, I'm assuming red food coloring into one of them. And he said, these are your sins. And then he dropped the next. Probably bleach. I'm assuming into the water and all the red disappeared.

It was kind of exciting and fun. We were all kids and he said, this is what happens when you pray. And you ask God to forgive you. your sins will be forgiven just like that. Poof, they're gone. And so he set us up for that prayer meeting. And when we sat in his lap and I don't know what other kids said to him, I didn't know, for 20 or more years.

And he started that with, uh, uh, uh, questions about me and my brothers being sexually inappropriate with each other. I mean, graphically asking me questions and

Rod: And you outline those specific questions.

Deb: been very graphic in my book, exactly what he asked me and exactly what I said. and so that is what I had come to expect is that he was looking for some kind of sexual behavior between me and my brothers and I couldn't own that.

So he sent me out of there. I was sitting on the steps outside the chapel while the other kids got the Holy Ghost and got their Holy Ghost red stamp. So, and I feel like that is that I was seven when that

Rod: You were seven and he was specifically asking you whether he and he was, these were graphic questions, asking whether you had participated in specific sexual acts with your brothers

Deb: specific graphic. I had never heard of some of the things he asked me. I was so completely shocked.

Rod: and you were seven. years old and you didn't have a clue what he's talking about.

Deb: I was, and I was afraid. I was afraid of that man, in a way that is hard to describe now. well, I have described it in my book about how we were so afraid of him that we learned to hide from him.

If we smelled his cologne, or if we heard his dog tags, we could hide if we were lucky. Um, so I was afraid of that, man. I was terrified of him. We made, we went out of our way to hide from him. So that day was kind of different. He was being kind, he was absolving us of our sins. And I couldn't say yes, I couldn't say that I had done what he wanted me to do.

And that is where my path started that day. And that's

Rod: You also described, I think your siblings saying, well, didn't you tell him that

Deb: twenty-five

Rod: wanted to hear, cause that'll get you absolved of everything, right?

Deb: say to my sisters, what did you say to them? And they said, we just told him whatever he wanted to hear. You were the only one who didn't get that. I mean, they were with me when he told us he burned our tongue out with a red, hot poker. If we lied to him and they couldn't believe that, I would say you don't have a fireplace, but that was who I was.

I was an instinctive talker. And I said, what was in my brain? I said, what I had, what I had come to conceive as being the notion, you know, it was like, children are not stupid. They make connections. They understand things. I knew a person who doesn't have a fireplace, doesn't have a poker. and it just, this was the strangeness in me.

This was a concrete brain. This was someone who, who couldn't stop the absolutes. So when I said, no, I believe that meant that I wasn't safe anymore. I now could speak to his deviance because that was deviant. That was a deviant thing to do, put little children in your lap and talk to them about sexual, things like that So, And it trickled out over the next few years until I was nine. And then when it was, when I was nine, it came all the way home and. So that umbrella of being a liar happened right. Then, uh, being someone who wasn't compliant. And then I just, from there, my life was just a sort of terror, you know? And then it culminated at age nine when he, and then it all changed.

It wasn't me and my brothers, it was me molesting other little girls in the Park. So Yeah. the man

Rod: there was, and obviously there's no basis for any of these accusations, that

Deb: basis

Rod: He's just making all this stuff up.

Deb: none. And for an adult to listen to these things and have no foundation for them and for an adult to pick me up off the floor and burn my fingers 'cause they were told to

Rod: And on a hot stove.

Deb: I would cut my throat before I do that to a child.

Rod: Yeah. Yeah.

Deb: So how is it that faith and love and hope and literally our creed, you know, no luck.

Love, no creed, but Christ one mind, one accord that was everything. And so to some degree, the adults acted in one mind and one accord when it came to the children and it felt like we were expendable. And that's the part that is so hard for so many of us. When we were teens, after we'd moved to Flagstaff, I had nephews who had a great deal of trouble with marijuana.

They were pot smokers. and all I remember hearing was about what the heck is wrong with them. Here you go again, what's wrong with them. But we were also under a very hard rule. We will not discuss the Park. We will never speak of the bad times in the Park. So if children did bring it up, they were made to feel as if they were lying or telling an untruth you know, and it just not,

Rod: yeah,

Deb: it

Rod: it wasn't what was wrong with them. It was what had happened to them.

Deb: to them.

Rod: According to Lee Vale William Branham knew that Leo Mercier and Gene Goad were gay. Lee Vale said in a sermon in 2000 that Leland and Gene two homosexuals attached themselves to brother Brandon's ministries, Tate boys, which was allowed by God or their involvement with Brandon was allowed by God.

And when they absolutely showed what they were, God warned, brother, Brandon, what would happen to them. And I saw the vision in the vision book, leave them alone. They will go in, they will leave and go into false.

This is what Lee Vale said publicly. I, my view, the of Lee veil is that he was lying because he said he saw the vision book that brand and family says, oh, no, the vision book was lost.

And if it did exist, it might have contained some things that proved William Branham be a false prophet. So if there was such a book, I think they probably destroyed it.

Deb: You know, we don't need a vision book to know that he said things that were false

Rod: oh yeah.

Deb: false prophet

Rod: But the most logical explanation is that the book never existed. So what do you think about Lee Vale's comments?

Deb: Well, was it a vision book or was it an ODL? A piece of paper and his mother's house? You know, I've heard that too. Um, Lee Vail was part of his early, early ministry. So I believe he had knowledge of Leo and Gene. Um, and like I say, of these two men, I mean, Gene just became another man in the Park. He was a hunter.

He, he was the guy who zeroed in all the guns. He had children. My, I grew up with Leo was my monster, but Leo was ultimately the dominant in that situation. I would, I would say absolutely. And I believe that Lee Vayle probably understood their proclivities when they came into, I have always wondered what they had on William Branham.

Tell you the truth. I mean, I have no basis for that, but I think they just showed up one day and they're given the whole caboodle, the tapes, the recordings. Um, so?

Yeah. I don't believe in a vision book and I don't believe in the old yellow paper, I believe when somebody has a prophetic vision, they say it, they document it and then it comes to pass.

And that is in a single prophetic vision that William Branham had. So.

Rod: bizarre is if he had actually had this vision and knew that they would go off into haywire stuff and false doctrines, Lee Vale said, why would he tell your dad it's all gonna work out? Okay. Why would he put these group of people and say the things that he did in the sermons that he did, it just makes no sense.

Deb: Very good question. And when I was, when he came to The, Park the second time and he walked around to every trailer and I've described how that felt to me like a king on progress, um, he picked me up and he picked my sister up any talk to her parents and, you know, we padded Sharon's head and, you know, I have every day since then asked myself, did he see, did he have a vision

of what would happen to me in the next seven years? And if he didn't, why the heck not? He was a prophet. He is the one who bolstered the place, endorsed the place. So why couldn't he say to my parents run from here, get your children out of here, or they will suffer. Isn't that what a prophet is all about. So how do you conceptualize that? Other than to say, or as a child learned to, believe that it was all meant to happen, you were meant to suffer.

You were meant to be treated. Because God said, so William Branham said, so Leo Mercier said, so I don't believe God said that at all. I don't believe God had anything to do with it. I believe that people were looking seeking, and they looked in the wrong place and their children suffered for it. Now every player, every parent on the planet does things their children's suffer for, but not to this degree.

Rod: Yeah. Yeah.

Deb: And there are a large number of children now, adults from the Park who have suffered.

Rod: the court transcript that are referred to with respect to Keith Leuchars trial also stated that there was also evidence that Mercer sexually abused children. Now, I know you don't refer to it specifically. It's obliquely referred to in your book to your knowledge where there were any of the children in the Park sexually abused.

And I know we don't want to talk about names, but.

Deb: so in my book, I describe what I call sexualized abuse because that's what he did to me.

I feel like he hated girls. He hated women. He felt like they were lowly. Um, I do know that there were male children sexually abused in the Park. Um, I can't speak to who they are, but I, I, he, he, his sexual proclivities weren't toward women or girls.

They were toward men and boys. And I believe that in William Branham, he found another woman hater. And so that fed him, that fed him his hatred of women.

So, I mean, these are things that I've surmised

Rod: Yeah.

Deb: they make sense. But

Rod: sense when you look at it, because you're trying to make sense of a strange situation.

] **Deb:** and he used William Branham's words to batter me as a child, not lower than a dog or a hog, not worth the good clean bullet to kill me.

Those are William Brandon's words. Ed recently, one of my family members called me, um, an insolent back, slid bobbed hair, adulterer,

Rod: This is a family member.

Deb: the family member. So whose mouth did those words come out of?

Rod: Yeah,

Deb: And who does that with the love of God in their mind, in their heart?

Rod: No, And this is the problem with people in the message they feel because their prophet said these things, that they are afraid free to say them as well. The problem is when Jesus was confronted with sin, he didn't condemn. And that should be our approach as well. We love people.

We don't, In fact, it's very dangerous to judge because Jesus said the way you judge is the way you're going to be judged. I'm into mercy. A lot of mercy.

Deb: no kidding.

Rod: Yeah,

Deb: And these are the things that, that if, if, if Jesus said this, if he said, judge, not that. ye don't, you're not judged. Why do they think that everybody on the planet is there to judge? What do they think that

Rod: What because Jesus isn't there. Example William Branham is

Deb: these is

Rod: William Branham is there is that so William Branham takes precedence over Jesus.

Deb: and here's William Branham. And this is my absolute.

Rod: Yeah.

Deb: So, and, and this is what I watched happen over the years.

When things that brother Branham said did not occur. I watched the, a lot of the disillusion, but what people do then is that they just regroup And they create another event. If the Lord was coming in 1977, I was 16. the Lord was coming in 1977. And we

Rod: everybody believed that.

Deb: Everybody believed that,

Rod: is not, now they say, oh, it wasn't a prophecy.

Just, it Diction and they try to downplay it. But that's not what happened in 1977, everybody was sitting around waiting for the end

Deb: In 1977, I was in, in, in December 31st, 1977, I was in a meeting at the Tucson tabernacle

Rod: Pearry green.

Deb: Pearry Green's Tucson tabernacle. And I, I believe Pearry Green preached that night. I can't say absolutely. What I do remember is that the Lord was coming tomorrow before tomorrow. And if you don't get baptized, you're not going it's our whole life was about you're not going unless you meet somebody whose expectation, they baptized terrified kids until three or four in the morning.

And my dad was angry at me because I didn't go up there and get baptized. And I was like, dad, it is January 1st, 1978. Right now, it's not happening. And then we heard again that it would be 1984 and my dad was always trying to come up with a new date. And when he would decide on a new date and then the very last thing he was deciding was that we had to be in Jeffersonville

Indiana to make the rapture. And I just told him, dad, you know what, I'm right here in Arizona. And God is big enough to take me right out of Arizona, you know, but it was, it was sort of this pragmatism that I felt like I could assign that

none of them could. And I was stumped by it. Why not just, be rational, but that is not something a lot of people are capable of doing.

But I watched this. Ultimately my dad was ultimately destroyed by the fact that promises Thus Saith, The Lord promises made to him did not happen

Rod: did not come to pass. Yeah. Yeah. And I want to ask you a question about that a little bit. Your book talks about you being in college training to become a nurse and you ended up having Leo Mercier under your care. That's just a bizarre chain of events.

Deb: it is. It is. And who can say why these things come about, except that it's something that I needed to happen.

Rod: I would've given him something probably. You're not allowed to give him.

Deb: And I have to be careful what I say because the 50 years on HIPAA violations are not up yet on his hospitalization or his illnesses, but. I thought for seven years to get to school, to go to school, we had gone to Flagstaff. We didn't have much to do with Leo and Gene anymore. Leo stayed in Prescott, living openly with another man.

Um, continued his, I will say that he continued his proclivities to drug abuse and alcoholism. Um, when I got into school, it was another, it was a seven year. It was a fight to get to school, but I did finally get there. And when we had our first or second day of clinicals on the third floor, you know, I made it, I had finally won the war.

I got to school. I was in that nursing uniform. I was getting my sick patients for the day. And in, in yellow pie, regional medical center, those days they had four bed wards.

So they would give the nursing student for the day award, uh, for patients. And the first day of my clinicals, I went into the third floor nursing station and I was given a piece of paper with four names on it.

And I read those names and I was just like, oh, Leo w Mercier room 3 24 or whatever. And I just went, no. And I didn't know what to do. I really didn't know what to do. It did not occur to me to recuse myself or say, I can't do this. I was too excited to be there. I mean, I wanted to be a nurse more than almost any.

Rod: Yeah.

Deb: And so, and you know, I don't remember much about any of the other three patients and that's what sad, but I was just, my knees felt like rubber. I was absolutely terrified. And I always thought if I had a chance to, in the future, injure him or knock his head in or do something awful to him, I would take it.

Right.

So when I walked into that room and this was a couple of years before he died, he was, um, beginning to fight his illnesses and he was pretty sick. And I just started, I didn't know what to do, but to just start doing what I was supposed to do, which was take vital signs, change the bed. And, you know, he was pathetic in so many ways and he looked up at me and he said, I know who you are.

And he started talking about how we would all be back here. He is few years from death and he was talking about how we would all be back under him when we saw that we couldn't make it without him and I, this is where I experienced. What I felt was a life-changing event.

is that what I saw was a pathetic human who had ruined a lot of lives, but in the process ruined his own.

And this is when I understood I could forgive him. And so for me,

you know, I've sort of described that all poetically as something that I felt like just, wow, this is going to happen. I'm going to forgive him. I'm going to let him off the hook and I'm going to be better for it. So then I told him, I said, I know who you are and I forgive you.

And I, that's what I put in my book. And I just told them, I'm going to take good care of you. I'm going to give you my best. And then I am going to walk away from me. And that is what I did. And so from that point, I didn't have that. That fear in a lot of ways, I felt like, I mean, these are the very last lines of my book.

I felt like I was free to follow my path to, to create my life and to become who I wanted to be. But I had no idea what that psychological trauma of my childhood would do to me over the next several years

Rod: later years.

Deb: and what I experienced for years in my life. Because the second time they cut my hair, they buzzed me like a Marine.

I was tormented at school. I would wake up at night and I know my first husband struggled with some of my difficulties and I, I couldn't always explained to him why I was traumatized the way I was, but you can't help It When something happens to you that you aren't instigating, I would just literally wake up sweaty hands.

And my hair is my hair still here. Oh my God. My hair is still here. And I had those nightmares all my life.

Rod: Yeah,

Rod: it was a very traumatic event.

Deb: and why, why didn't I have traumatic nightmares about beatings? Why were my traumatic nightmares about the thing that was the most humiliating to me in my. Um, the thing that set me apart and made me abomination among 50 other kids, you know, there was a hundred kids there from the time, the Park from the inception until the Park ended 101 by my count total

Deb: about 209 people total

Rod: in the Park.

Deb: in the Park, I believe about 39 of them were girls and of those 39 girls, 10 or 11 have suffered cancer.

Um, other life-threatening diseases. I feel like when you spend a lot of time in your life being reviled as a worthless being, because you're female, those things haunt you later, they

Rod: your immune system.

Deb: And there's huge connections to childhood trauma and disease. And this is what I felt happened with Esther.

I feel like that childhood trauma is ultimately what connected her to disease in her body. We don't have cancer in our family. We have a lot of harder, deep

hearts, heart disease, a lot of diabetes, but no cancer. So these are all things that, that this is my goal

break. The silence, give these, and, and I'm sorry that I waited so long to do it because I am. So this means that these are adult people who have lived most of their lives with these traumas now. but, if somebody speaks, if somebody breaks the silence, maybe they can explore some of their broken pieces. The way I have explored mine.

And this book for me has been in a way like exposure therapy. I stopped having those nightmares.

I don't have them anymore because I've faced it. I wrote it down and I said, what it made me feel and how I, what I felt I did, who above it?

Rod: I know Brene Brown in her books talks about how cathartic it is to actually write it down. And it, it will eliminate not all of the trauma but a large part of it just kind of processing it, because writing is a way of processing. what happened to you.

Deb: I would agree 100% because you don't even have to share it. If it's

Rod: No, no.

Deb: for me sharing it is about giving some of them a voice that they've never had is about telling the world. Yes. We've been shut down for 48 years now. Yes. We've kept our silence. We've been a heck of a lot more graceful than our parents.

Then the adults of the Park, where we have gracefully, allowed them to live into their old age and die in their beds while the babies are dying. My nephew Edward died last year. Never outrun some of that stuff,

Deb: you know,

Rod: did your parents ever acknowledge that what they allowed happened? He was horribly wrong.

Deb: it was never spoken of that was the rule. So by the time I was grown and had become an adult and moved on into my own life, my father came to Washington to visit my family. And I was about 36 years old. And at the time my husband had left me and I was in a very, very tenuous, traumatic place. And

I, I questioned So many things about these people and why they could do these things.

And I sat my dad down at the kitchen table and I said to him, and I could always be playing with my dad. He wasn't used to being challenged by his daughters, but you know, I said, dad, if you don't speak to me, if you don't talk to me about these things that happened to us and you don't explain how you could let it happen, you are going to lose me forever.

And you know, He had appeared at my house. He talked to me on the phone a few days earlier. He was in Arizona. I was in Washington and he could see that I was distraught. And he literally showed up at my house a few days later in Washington with my mother. And this is the abiding love that I know they had for their children and that I had for them.

So he, he began to, he put his hands and he, he put his head in his hands and he began to weep. And he said to me, honey, brother Branham told me it would all be okay that I could go on ahead. It would all be all right. And you know, I wanted, I intended to just bash him that when we sat down, I intended to say, how could you let this happen to me? How could you do this? But he gave me the only answer he had and I, I couldn't go any further.

Deb: So it just was one of those pieces where I said, talk to me now or lose me forever. And that's what he did. And that was the explanation he offered me, which. Ultimately satisfied with at that point.

Rod: So talking about your dad in your book you referenced your dad's dying words, which were brother Branham, allied to me. I have been betrayed. What was your dad's speaking those words in reference to, cause you don't really say that in your book. How had William Branham brother Branham betrayed him?